

IN THE SPECIFICATION

[0028] Another embodiment provides efor a computer-implemented method of selling products over the world-wide web. It includes providing a database which centrally stores agreements between a plurality of members selling a product. It also includes: sending a web page from a first member to a customer, the web page identifying a product that is the subject of one of the agreements of the database; receiving a request for the product from the customer, the request including an image provided by the customer; generating a first purchase order from the first member to a second member based on a second agreement stored in the database, the purchase order including the image; and generating a second purchase order from the second member to a third member based on a third agreement stored in the database, the purchase order including the image. The method may also include the step of storing the agreements by sending information relating to the agreements to the database via the Internet.

[0035] As shown in FIGURE 1, a system 50 in accordance with one embodiment of the invention comprises a network of computers such as an end user personal computer 60 which communicates with web servers 70-72 via the Internet 80. Although only a few computers are depicted in FIGURE 1, it should be appreciated that a typical system can include a large number of connected computers. Preferably, the end user computer 60 is a general purpose computer having all the internal components normally found in a personal computer such as, for example, central processing unit (CPU) 61, display 62, CD-ROM 63, hard-drive 64, mouse 65, keyboard 66, speakers 67, microphone 68, modem 69 and all of the components used for connecting these elements to one another. The End user computer 60 communicates with the Internet 80 via modem 69. The End user computer 60 may

comprise any work station capable of processing instructions and transmitting data to and from humans and other computers, including PDA's with modems and Internet-capable wireless phones.

[0039] As shown in Figure 2, one of those tables is Member Table 110. Member Table 110 stores information about the individual members. Each member occupies a record in the Member Table and the record includes the member's name 111 and biographical information such as the member's address 112³, the nature of its business and the like. By way of example, record 115 of Member Table 110 may contain information about a company known as "Retailer A" whose name is stored in Name field 111 and whose address of 1 Main Street is stored in Address field 112. Exemplary records 116-18 correspond with three different companies having three different names (such as Broker B, Distributor C, Manufacturer D) and addresses.

[0044] It is not always possible to know, in advance, the value of every field before a product is ordered. For example, while Retailer A knows that it will charge the public \$12 for Product #1, it does not know until the time-of-sale who the purchaser is or where it will be shipped. In this instance, Relationship Table 120 contains codes which identify the missing information, such as:

Product 121	Seller 122	Buyer 123	Price 124	Ship To 125	ID 126
Product #1	Retailer A	Public	\$12	Prompt	1

whereby "Public" means that any member of the public may be a buyer and "Prompt" means that the system will prompt the buyer for the information at the time of sale. Accordingly, the system allows a retailer with a standard set of retail prices to store its retail prices in the database for public viewing even though the buyer's identity is unknown. Moreover, rather than defining

the potential buyer as the entire public, other codes could be used to limit the potential buyers to a subset of the public or particular class of entities (such as "stamp retailers").

[0063] The features of personalization, uploading of images and pipelining purchase orders work together to provide yet another advantage of the invention, namely ~~to~~the ability to order accurate typesetting on-line. In another embodiment of the invention, the customer uploads a picture, graphic file or other information representing typesetting. For example, a typeset image may be created on-line as part of the process of a selecting a particular stamp, whereby the typesetting represents the impression made by the stamp. The system then converts the typesetting information into either a default graphic file format or the format needed ~~for~~ by the manufacturer to create the product. The typesetting and design, which was created by the end user, is then centrally stored in the database and made available to the members of the system as described above.

[0069] Yet another advantage of the invention is that it is not limited to complete products. Most manufacturers purchase one or more of a product's parts from different parties. The system may be configured such that purchase orders for products automatically generate purchase orders for the constituent parts. For example, as shown in Figure 3, the Relationship Table 1120 may have a Bill of Material field 1127. In accordance with the operation discussed above, when the processor 90 pulls a record from Relationship Table 120, it checks the Bill of Material field 1127 to see if the sale of the product involves the sale of individual parts as well. If Bill of Material field 1127 is not null, then instead of checking whether the seller is also listed as a buyer in a different relationship record for the entire product, the system checks whether the seller is listed as a buyer for the individual

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parts. If so, i.e., if the seller of the product is also a buyer of the parts, then the process proceeds with the products/parts listed in the Bill of Material field 1127 in the same manner as described above in connection with Product #1.